

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole Head of the church both as a universal body and as local congregations His headship and administration over the local church is effected by a body of elders.

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

ELDERS AND MINISTRY GIFTS

Hope Ovwah
Aderoju Oyefusi

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts
by Hope Ovwah & Aderoju Oyefusi

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Preface

This material is concerned primarily with leadership and administration in the Assembly of God's people in a given place (the local church). It is borne out of a practical session held with some brethren at the instance of the Lord. Accordingly, the issues discussed are presented in a way that addresses some of the practical concerns of many of God's people. Even though they are not treated in full details, sufficient information is provided to serve the present need. The material complements an existing Book, GOD'S PATTERN CHURCH, which deals with some of the thoughts covered here as well as others that relate to the functioning of the local church. In a forthcoming material, THE ROUTE OF DIVINE CONQUEST, we examine how the Lord advances His rule and government (His kingdom) in the earth through the instrumentality of the local church. May the Lord fasten upon our hearts the principles of truth presented here, to the praise and honour of His glorious name Amen!

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

ELDERS AND MINISTRY GIFTS

Table of Content

Chapter 1	
Introduction	7
Chapter 2	
How the Local Church Runs Her Affairs	16
Chapter 3	30
Ministry in the Local Church.....	30
Chapter 4	
Primary Responsibility of Ministries	47
Beyond The In-Part Realms	54
Chapter 5	
Bonding through Fellowship.....	56
Chapter 6	
The Local Church and the Body of Christ	65
Introduction.....	65
The Assembling Of Ourselves Together.....	69
The Lord Jesus Christ, the LocalChurch and His Other Sheep	69

Chapter 1

Introduction

⁶For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isa 9: 6, 7)

²²And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, ²³Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph 1: 22. 23).

¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. ¹²And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; ¹³And in the midst of the seven candlesticks *one* like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. ¹⁴His head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire; ¹⁵And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. ¹⁶And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Eph 5:23).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole Head of the Church, His body. He rules and administers her affairs, walking in the midst of the candlesticks as Lord to *order and establish it with judgment and*

Spiritual Leadership

justice. His government in the midst of the local church is accomplished in two ways

- (a) Through the ministry of His word in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord carries out His redemptive activities by the word and by the Spirit. *And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword* (see Heb. 4:12) *and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength*. In the ministry of His word, a way is made for His all-conquering power and glory to be revealed and for His kingdom to be established...*In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof* (Ps19:1-11; Rom 10:18).
- (b) By the administration (day-to-day running of the affairs) of the church. This includes physical administration, attending to the welfare of the

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

Lord's people and related issues, and spiritual administration, including the administration of spiritual discipline where necessary...*His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

In the **local Church** (see chapter six for more on what a local church is), the responsibility for ensuring that the government of the Lord is revealed and effected in His house, is placed on a **body of elders (Presbytery)** (1 Tim 4:14). An elder (a **presbuteros**) is one that has come of age spiritually, is well-established in the knowledge of God, and has proved to be morally and spiritually stable and faithful to the call of the gospel. This is the minimum requirement for a believer to participate in the administration of the local Church.

This minimum quality of life that is required for anyone to participate in administration in the kingdom is presented in symbolic form as *a sea of glass clear as*

Spiritual Leadership

crystal in Rev 4:6 (see also Rev 15:2). The condition of the believer's soul was once like the raging sea (Isa. 57:20), restless, tossed to and fro by earthly and sinful passions, untrusting, full of fears and anxieties, blown by every wind of doctrine, ready to burst out at any provocation, unfocused, unstable. However, overtime, by His word and Spirit, the Lord accomplishes a great deal of transformation in the soul of all who yield to Him. Instead of a raging sea condition throwing up mire and dirt, the soul now has the features of a calm, trusting, well-formed and stable sea, which is clear and transparent. There is no more tossing about by the wind, no more hypocrisy or guile. Looking at it, you can see the light of the glory of God shining through and through (Math 5:16). The one who must function as an elder in the local church sharing in the administration of Christ in His house must have been proven to be morally and spiritually stable.

Another description used to capture the moral and spiritual status required of an elder in the scriptures is **the stature of a perfect man** (Eph. 4:13, Phil 3:15, James 3:2). The Greek word translated *perfect* in these passages is *teleios*. It means (spiritual) adulthood,

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

maturity (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, SEC G5046). It is different from "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" mentioned in the latter part of Eph. 4:13 and inferred in Phil 3:12 when Paul said *not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect*.

So the administration of God's house (the local church) is by the divine arrangement, to be carried out by a **body of elders**. The Scriptures reveal further that there are two levels of eldership in a local Church. They are described in 1 Tim 3 as

- (a) The service of a bishop (1 Tim 3:1). The Greek word translated the *office of a bishop* here is *episkope* meaning the act of overseeing the affairs of a body of people (SEC G1984). The emphasis is not on an official title taken on but on the service fulfilled by an individual.
- (b) The service of a deacon (1 Tim 3:8). The Greek word translated deacon is *diakonos* meaning *to execute the command of another, to serve as an attendant, a waiter* (SEC G1249).

Spiritual Leadership

While the service of a bishop relates to **primary** spiritual leadership, that of a deacon may be considered to be a **secondary** level of leadership. In other words, the deacons labour together with the bishops relieving them of (helping to bear) aspects of the burden of spiritual leadership. The minimum qualifications for the believer to serve in each of these two capacities are stated in verses 1-7 and 8-13 of 1 Tim. 3 respectively.

A consideration of 1 Tim 5:17 reveals that not all elders in a local church labour in the word of God and doctrine, even though they may fulfil the **ministry of helps** (more on these in chapter three). In other words, there are some who serve as elders who may not have been admitted by God into the estate of the **five-fold ministry**. In addition, we are shown in 1 Pet 5:1 that all who have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry, including those occupying the room of apostles and prophets, function also as elders.

In relation to the administration of the local church, persons that have been raised up into the estate of the five-fold ministry are part of the elders of the church. But they also fulfil an additional responsibility that has

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

to do with the ministry of the word of God along the lines of the specific graces that the Lord has dispensed to them. Drawing inspiration from the above scriptural passages, it may be rightly inferred that those among the elders of the local church that have also been called into the five-fold ministry serve at the primary level of spiritual leadership.

To summarize, God has arranged that in a typical local church, there will be a **body of elders** (consisting of bishops and deacons) who under the sole headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, bear the responsibility of administering His government, rule and will in His house. They will be at various levels of growth and manifest differing graces and abilities. Among them, there will be some that have been raised to the estate of the five-fold ministry, empowered to labour in *the word and doctrine* according to the dispensation of God.

Together, as one man, this **body of elders** constitutes the **angel of the local church**: Rev 2:1, 8, 12, etc.). Occupying the place of the shoulder in the body and remaining under the Head, they bear the Lord's burden for His people (Isa 9:6). In the next two chapters, we

Spiritual Leadership

shall look at these two spheres of the responsibility of the leadership of the local church, that is, **administration and the ministry of the word of God and doctrine.**

Chapter 2

How the Local Church Runs Her Affairs

In this chapter, we will be focusing on the administration of the affairs of the local church by the body of elders under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The number of elders in a local church (as well as the level of their spiritual growth) will depend on the condition of the church. Some local churches may have a significant number of persons that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry (as it was in the church in Jerusalem during the first few decades following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2). In such setting, the number of persons serving as elders may be quite large. The level of spiritual graces manifested would also be very high. In other local churches, the number of elders may be few and the level of their spiritual growth not as high.

Spiritual Leadership

Thus, the number of persons that should serve as elders in a local church is not fixed. In Rev. 4, a chapter examined in the Book, *The route of divine conquest*, we are shown 24 elders, but the number is not to be understood literally. It is used symbolically to indicate that the elders are witnesses in whose lives the government of the Lord has been largely established (through testing) and who serve to extend the same government over the local church and over the earth.

The scriptures show that if the ministries in a local church are faithful, overtime, the number of persons who could serve as elders and those raised to the estate of the five-fold ministry should increase. Consider, for example, the picture revealed in Rev. 22:1-5. ...*A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. On either side of the river was there the tree of life...* Where the word of God and the testimony of Jesus are being (continuously) preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and the people are receiving the word and opening their hearts to the rule of the ALMIGHTY GOD and the Lamb (the river of the water of life is flowing), there will always be found more and more persons growing up into the estate

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

of ministry. Isa 61:3 shows that the trees are symbolic of human persons that have grown to the estate in which they can be effective witnesses of the life and power of the gospel. From well-trimmed grasses (Zec. 10:1), they grow to become *trees of righteousness, the plantings of the Lord that He might be glorified.*

Faithfulness on the part of the ministries within the local church will birth more and more persons into leadership and ministry. It is the additional responsibility of those already in the estate of ministry to recognize these ones and to **draw them nigh**. (We will return to this thought in chapter four where we examine the responsibilities of ministries in the local church). If we find a situation in which overtime the number of persons that can serve in spiritual leadership in the local church is not increasing, it may be an indication of some measure of unfaithfulness or a lack of understanding (or both) on the part of the ministries.

In examining the administration of the affairs of the local church, we will ask and answer the questions: what is the limit of the authority of the elders in a church; how are decisions taken on issues? These and

Spiritual Leadership

related questions will form the basis of our consideration in this chapter.

We begin with the first question. It is very important to note that by the divine arrangement, the responsibility and authority of elders are limited to the local church in which the Lord has placed them. This pattern, set forth in the scriptures and practiced by the church at its inception, was reinforced by the Lord in the Book of Revelation where He came to set things straight in the midst of His body.

There in Rev 2 and 3, the word *churches* is used to show that though the body of Christ (the Church) is one, there are **autonomous units**; expressions of that body (**the local churches**) in the earth, each one reflecting the general features of the body and having the Lord Jesus Christ as head. (In chapter six, we will show what constitutes the basis of this demarcation of the church). In Rev 1, each **local church** is shown to be a candlestick with a body of elders having oversight and bearing responsibility under the Lord for the administration of her affairs. As we noted in the

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

preceding chapter, the body of elders are said to be the **angel** (messenger) of the local church.

Now, in communicating His counsel to the churches, the Lord addresses the angel of each local church. This is because by the divine arrangement, each local church is to administer her affairs under His headship through the leadership (eldership, angel) placed in her midst to have oversight. The “*angel*” of the church in Ephesus is not responsible under God for the administration of the affairs of the church in Smyrna and vice versa, etc.

This **autonomy** of the local church together with the plurality of ministries and persons in leadership over the assembly is designed by the Lord to preserve the fact of His headship over the Church. It ensures that the Lord, and not man, is the One administering the affairs of the assembly.

This consideration naturally leads to the question: is eldership transferrable from one local church to another? Put differently, if an elder in a local church moves to another local church, does he automatically become an elder in the new local Assembly? The

Spiritual Leadership

question is deliberately set to reinforce the observation just made, that is, the responsibility and authority of elders are limited to the local church to which they belong. Thus, if a believer who was serving in leadership capacity in a local church relocates and becomes a member of another church, he does not automatically become an elder in the local church in his new place of residence.

However, he may be admitted by the elders of the church in the place into leadership responsibility if they perceive the grace of God upon him as he fellowships among them, or they receive a word from the Lord to so do. What is clear is that such a person must not push (force) himself into anything. If the life of Christ has been significantly formed in him, his gift will make room for him wherever he goes (Pro 18:16).

Expectedly, the body of elders in a local church is to meet regularly to pray and seek the Lord concerning the furtherance of His purpose and to take decisions related to the administration of His will in and through the body. Numbers 10:4 provide a basis for the gathering of the elders as distinct from the gathering of the entire

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

congregation. There are also copious examples in both the Old and New Testament scriptures. From the divine perspective, the meeting of the elders for the purposes mentioned above is the most important meeting of the local church. In such meetings, instructions, directions and empowerment are received all of which come to bear upon the congregation and the work of the kingdom.

The coming together of the elders in meetings may be at two levels. There could be a regular meeting of those in the primary spiritual leadership (mainly but not exclusively those that have been brought into the estate of the five-fold ministry). A main purpose of such meetings, among other things, would be to seek the Lord for directions in ministry and in the things He would have the church do relative to the advancement of His interest in the earth. A very good example is found in Acts 13:1-2

¹Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the

Spiritual Leadership

tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Secondly, there can be regular meetings of all the elders (including those who have not come to the estate of ministry; that is, those in secondary spiritual leadership). An example is what we find in Acts 15. The particular meeting at Jerusalem, of which we may presume all the apostles and elders were in attendance (verse 6) was called to attend to an urgent matter related to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to the next question. Who takes charge when the elders of the local church meet? The scriptures show that this responsibility is not divinely assigned to any **particular** individual, even though it is possible to have one person always doing so out of an informal agreement among the elders, or flowing from mutual submission one to another. In other words, **there is no official hierarchy that assigns to any of the elders any form of headship over and above all others.** Headship belongs solely to the Lord and is exercised by the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

If the agenda is clear to all, any of the elders could be asked to coordinate a given meeting as the occasion demands. Any could also take up the responsibility under the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The particular meeting of the elders of the church in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, for example, appears to have been coordinated by James, one of the Apostles.

Another matter of concern is how decisions are arrived at by the elders. As earlier mentioned, Christ is the head of the Church; He does all her thinking for her. The church does not have a mind of her own; she has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). **The local church is not one man's limited liability company; it is the domain of the King where Jesus Christ reigns as Lord over all.** In administering the affairs of the church, the mind of the Lord must be **sought** and **obtained** on all issues, particularly those which relate to spiritual administration.

Some clarifications are needed at this point. We can separate between issues that the elders in the local church would have to handle that are merely physical (such as deciding on days, times and place of meetings)

Spiritual Leadership

and those that are spiritual. In matters that pertain to merely **physical administration**, human wisdom can come into play and is acceptable to the Lord, even though it is also possible to receive specific instructions from the Lord on these. However, in matters that have to do with **spiritual administration**, decisions are to be based **absolutely** on the will and mind of the Lord on an issue.

The mind of the Lord could be discerned from the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures, containing the word of God written and handed over to us, is the mouth of God. When we say that the mouth of the LORD has spoken a thing, it means that the thing is written in the scriptures. The scriptures are the primary prophecies conveying to us the Lord's mind on all issues. In deciding on any issue that relate to the spiritual administration of the local church, the elders must make recourse to the written word.

The mind of the Lord on an issue could also be made known through the operation of the Holy Spirit in a revelatory or inspirational gift (a dream, a trance, a vision, an inward impression, a discerning by the Holy

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

Spirit, a prophecy, word of wisdom or word of knowledge etc.). This constitutes a secondary prophecy and could be used of the Lord to convey His mind on a matter. When a ministration comes in prophetic symbols, the Lord can be trusted to ensure that there is **at least** one person among the elders that will be able to provide an interpretation.

Of course, until a message given using spiritual imageries (a dream, vision etc.) is interpreted to discern the Lord's mind in it, it cannot be said that a word has been received from the Lord. At the same time, what may be discerned as the mind of the Lord through a secondary prophecy must always be consistent with the scriptures of truth. If there is a clear contradiction, the secondary prophecy OUGHT NOT to be accepted as the word of the Lord. In general, when the way to go about a particular issue is not explicitly clear from the Scriptures, secondary prophecies are often needed.

Let us take illustrations from Act 13 and 15, the two chapters we considered earlier. In the meeting of some of the elders of the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-2), the Lord's mind was made known through the operation of

Spiritual Leadership

the gift of the Holy Spirit. It brought a directional instruction, which opened the door for the missionary journeys that began with Barnabas and Paul. Of course, there is no way they could have found such a specific instruction in the Holy Scriptures.

However, we find a different scenario in the meeting of the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15). During the meeting, Peter brought forth what he perceived to be the mind of the Lord based on knowledge (personal experience). In addition, James was given an insight by the Holy Spirit into a passage in the scriptures which helped them to clearly understand the Lord's mind on the specific issue that was before them. Peter's position, based on personal experience with the Lord, was in harmony with the position of scriptures opened up to James. And by a consideration of all the thoughts that came in, it was clear to them all what the mind of the Lord was.

Thus, always and at all times, decisions in relation to spiritual administration, must be based **absolutely** on the will (mind) of the Lord. Here, He does not allow for human wisdom. Where the mind of the Lord on an issue

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

cannot be clearly discerned and the meeting must be brought to a close, it is expected that the elders will take the matter home and continue to pray about it as they look forward to another time of meeting. If the hearts are truly upon to the Lord and there is a desire to know His mind, He will always speak. In any case, it is better to wait for as long as it takes to hear the voice of the Lord than to offer the “sacrifice of fools” (Eccl. 5: 1) because failure in leadership often has very pronounced effect on the local church.

The above observation leads to an important point. As earlier mentioned, those who serve in leadership capacity in the local church are at differing levels of grace and spiritual growth. There are those who by reason of the grace of God upon their lives and the years of faithful walk with Him are more spiritually endowed than others. Such may also have greater insight into the scriptures and so may be able to more easily discern the mind of the Lord on issues from the written word. It is therefore in the interest of the elders of a local church to always make use of the wisdom and counsel that comes from persons among them that are more spiritually endowed. But they must also do so in a

Spiritual Leadership

way that preserves the headship of Christ rather than setting man up as head.

Finally, what if it is only one person that has been raised to the estate of ministry in a local church? Well, such must labour in the word and in prayers seeking the Lord to send other ministries to serve together with him and/or raise up from the midst of the congregation persons that can join him in spiritual leadership. This must be taken as a matter of urgency and attended to with importunacy in prayers because a “one-man show” is generally at variance with the pattern revealed in scriptures and also easily leads to the setting aside of the headship of Christ.

Chapter 3

Ministry in the Local Church

The preceding chapter focused on administration of the affairs of the local church by the body of elders. In this chapter, we will be looking at the other level of responsibility that the Lord places on the spiritual leadership of the local church, which is the ministry of the word of God and doctrine. Like other aspects of spiritual administration, the ministry of the word of God at the primary level in the local church is a sacred responsibility. It is to be fulfilled by persons that the Lord has **by Himself** placed in the body for this purpose, that is, persons that have been brought into the estate of the **five-fold ministry**.

Now, as we shall show in the next chapter, every vital member of the local church (by that we mean all who are living true to the Lord in a life of consecration) can share in the work of ministry. There is a place for

Spiritual Leadership

the ministry of the body to itself in love (Eph. 4:16). As revealed in 1 Cor. 12 all of God's people in the local church can move in one or more of the operations of the gifts of the Spirit.

Apart from the five-fold ministry, there is also the **ministry of helps** whereby some by the grace they have received, occasionally perform such services that would have been carried out by any of the five-fold ministry. In other words, persons with the ministry of helps are those who can 'stand in' for others more established in ministries, being able to teach and preach the Word. Although such persons have not come up to the estate of five-fold ministry, nevertheless they are gifted by the risen Christ to bless the house of God. When faithful in service and consecration, they receive placement in one or the other of the five-fold ministry.

So the fact that a believer can teach or exhort from the word of God and does so in the midst of the congregation occasionally does not necessarily mean that such has been raised up to the estate of the five-fold ministry. This is the case even when their work is attended by the performance of a miracle or the grace to

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

prophecy or move in revelatory gifts. A believer that is less than a year old in the Lord may raise up the dead by an operation of the gift of faith or begin to see visions or prophecy by the Spirit, but that does not automatically imply that he is standing in one of the offices listed in Ephesians 4:11. However, it does signify that if faithful, overtime, he will grow into the estate of ministry.

The five-fold ministry (called joints of supply in Eph. 4:16) is deliberately placed by the Lord in the body with the responsibility of the ministry of the word of God. In other words, those who stand in that grace, apart from fulfilling the demands of the administration of the local church along with other elders, have a responsibility under God for the ministry of the word of God.

We will examine two passages in the Book of Numbers and then go to the Books of Acts to establish further the distinction between the service of the five-fold ministry and the ministry of helps.

Spiritual Leadership

“And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, And to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary” (Numbers 8:19)

⁶And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you *they are given as a gift for the LORD*, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. ⁷Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for everything of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office *unto you* as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. (Num 18:6, 7)

The Tabernacle of Moses and the Old Testament worship offers multiple pictures of the redemptive work of Christ under the New Testament. In one application, the nation of Israel with its 12 tribes may be viewed as the nations (or tribes) of the earth. This is line with God's promise to Abraham (Rom 4:18; Gen 15:5;22:18). The Levites, including the house of Aaron who

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

constitutes the priesthood, from this standpoint, represent the church. These are called-out from among their brethren (the human race) to be God's peculiar treasure. They serve God's interests in seeking to bring the nations to the knowledge of God thus establishing His rule on earth.

The distinction between the Levites and the priest in the passages above indicate something in relation to placements in the kingdom of heaven when fully raised up. Though having the same calling, not all will reign as Priests and kings in the kingdom when fully established. There will be some of God's people who do not attain to the heights that belong to *overcomers*. They come to an inheritance less than the royal priesthood. Nevertheless, they are still part of the kingdom of heaven.

However, it also helps to illustrate distinction in graces and services carried out while the church is yet in its developmental stages. This is our main purpose of coming to these passages. **The distinction is not one of persons but of service and responsibilities.** In this context, the priest's office under the Old Testament era typifies the estate of the five-fold ministry while the

Spiritual Leadership

non-priestly service of the tabernacle of the congregations is a type of the ministry of helps.

Note carefully that this separation to specific duties was strictly kept under the Old Testament. For example, there was no way that any Levite that was not of the lineage of Aaron could be a Priest. This distinction is not continued with in the Church age. The New Testament Scriptures teach that all believers are called to the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). God has arranged that each believer should not only grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him but also in the capacity to serve.

In other words, each believer, if faithful, is to move from one level of grace and service to higher levels until he comes into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. From the antitypical *service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation*, the believer should grow into the priest's office serving *for everything of the altar, and within the veil*.

Thus, under the New Testament, though graces and responsibilities in the service of God may differ, **there can be no officialdom in ministry or any form of**

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

visible demarcation among the Lord's people because all share the same divine calling and purpose. How faithfully a believer walks with God is a factor in determining his placement in the age to come.

What we saw in type in the passages above, is mirrored in the operations of the local Church as set forth in Acts 6, 7 and 8. Persons that have come to the estate of ministry (in this case, the apostles) required others to 'help out' in other aspects of administration. These must be *men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom* (Acts 6:3).

From the things we read concerning two of those appointed (Stephen and Phillip) in Acts 7 and 8, it is obvious that these ones also fulfilled the ministry of the word of God in the midst of the local church as the occasion warranted. It is also clear from the ministry of Stephen in Acts 7 and Phillip in Acts 8 that at the time the particular events occurred, they were already functioning effectively in the estate of the five-fold ministry.

Spiritual Leadership

Thus, always and at all times, those who are faithful in fulfilling the ministry of helps (including the aspect of administration involved) with time grow up into the estate of the five-fold ministry. *For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus* (1Ti 3:13).

The five-fold ministry as listed in Eph. 4:11 includes the ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. As stated in Num. 18:7 and confirmed in Eph. 4:11, this is *a service of gifts*. Those who function in this capacity do so by **the appointment and endowment of the Lord**. Persons may be appointed to eldership by those in primary spiritual leadership (persons that have come to the estate of ministry, especially those who bear the graces of apostle and prophet) based on their spiritual judgment or by a word from the Lord to them. However, **Ministry gifts are by the specific calling of Lord Himself**. They are not appointed or ordained by man even though man may recognize the grace the Lord has given and “draw the person nigh” by encouraging him to participate in the work of ministry.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

Three things must be manifested in somebody that has been raised up by the Lord to the estate of the five-fold ministry. First is grace along the line of the calling received. Second is a moral and spiritual character that has been proven over time. And the third is divine confirmation manifested in the blessings that flow from the person's ministry and the call for his ministry by the Lord's people.

A common element in the five-fold ministry is the preaching of the word of God. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers all operate by the preaching of God's word. An apostle is a *sent one*; a prophet is an inspired preacher and expounder of the word of God. The two ministries are foundational. They help to lay the foundation upon which other ministries build (1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 2:20).

Persons brought to the estate of the five-fold ministry often begin as evangelist, shepherd or teachers. As they continue faithfully in their stewardship, they are lifted into the ministry of either an apostle or that of a prophet.

Spiritual Leadership

This was so in the life of Paul for example. It took him a considerable period of faithful walk in the midst of the local church to earn recognition as a teacher of the Word. Moreover, Paul was blessed with experiences of divine encounters and dealings that showed up when after the space of 13 years he received the call to the apostolic office. It will be appropriate to observe that a person cannot just appear from nowhere and claim to be a minister of God and seek to serve in the local church or in public settings. There will always be preceding history of spiritual exposures that others can attest to in the person's life.

The **primary** responsibility of those in the five-fold ministry is the ministry of the word of God and prayers (Acts 6:4). This is a **most sacred** responsibility. Ministries administer the authority and rule of Christ over the church through the preaching of the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the medium of the word of God declared brings the kingdom into and upon all that believe the testimony given.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

While ministry of elders is usually set in the local congregations in the city of residence, the word of God in the mouth of His key servants is not confined to any region or nation. It goes into all the ends of the earth through various media reaching more and more of God's people (Psalm 19:4; Rom 10:8). For example, the administration of the Lord's words to each of the churches in Rev 2 and 3 was to be effected by the elders in each local church, but the message sent to each church was to be heard and made use of by all the churches. Therefore, we find the phrase at the end of each letter...*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the **churches**.*

This distinction between spiritual administration, as fulfilled by the elders in the local church, and the ministry of the word of God, as fulfilled by those among the elders that hold one or the other of the five principal offices, should be carefully noted. Oversight functions of Elders that border on the day to day affairs of the church is limited to their locality. However, the ministry of the word of God is to all the churches (all of God's people everywhere). While elders are appointed for the local church to administer her affairs under

Spiritual Leadership

Christ as Head, Ministry gifts are gifts to the body of Christ universally.

How then may we understand the authority of persons that have been raised up to the estate of the five-fold ministry, particularly as it relates to the church as a body with expressions all over the earth? Well, **the authority of persons that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry as far as the church as a universal body is concerned, starts and ends with the faithful proclamation of God's word.** They do not have administrative jurisdiction over any local church other than the ones in which they belong. In addition, the administrative responsibilities in the local church are not borne exclusively by principal Ministries. They will do so together with other persons in the eldership of the local church. They are required to observe mutual submission to one another. They will wholeheartedly give place to what is revealed as the Lord's mind on any issue.

The implication of the observation made above is that if somebody who has come into the estate of the five-fold ministry visits a local church outside the one in

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

which he fellowships, for example, and **the brethren know his testimony**, he should be received as a minister of the word. However, he has no authority as far as the administration of the affairs of the local church is concerned. If he has a word from the Lord for the church, he could deliver this through the preaching of the word of God and counselling by the word and allow the church to take the principles of God's word and apply them as a body that is directly responsible to Him (that is the Lord). **He (the visiting ministry) has no authority under God to enforce anything.**

If out of appreciation of the grace of God upon him, he is invited by the elders in the local church visited to a leadership meeting to advice on issues before them in which they seek the Lord's mind, he could offer his counsel on the matter based **preferably** (but not exclusively) on an interpenetration of the written word. It is then left to the elders of the local church to consider what has come to them and take a decision based on their persuasion on what the Lord's mind is, which decision they will also be responsible for under God.

Spiritual Leadership

Indeed, no person that has been raised to the estate of the five-fold ministry should presume that he has been given the kind of authority over the church that God gave to the 12 Apostles. The 12 Apostles were chosen by the Lord and enabled to partner together with Him in laying the foundation upon which the Church is built. Thus, there are certain things they were allowed by God to do in the pursuit of that purpose that may not belong to any other minister of the gospel, including those operating in the graces of apostles and prophets to venture into. Even back then, the Apostles knew the limits of their authority respecting the local affairs of the churches.

Consider the words of Paul to the elders of the church in Ephesus and of Peter in 1 Pet 5:1-6, for example. Though lengthy, we will reproduce the passages below without comment because the words themselves are very enlightening.

¹⁷And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. ¹⁸And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

been with you at all seasons, ¹⁹Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: ²⁰And how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, ²¹Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²²And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: ²³Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. ²⁴But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. ²⁶Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. ²⁸Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own

Spiritual Leadership

blood. ²⁹For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. ³²And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. ³⁴Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. ³⁵I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. ³⁶And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all (Acts 20: 17-36).

¹The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. ⁵Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. ⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time (1 Pet 5: 1-6)

Rev 21:14 shows that the names of the 12 Apostles of the Lamb are written upon the foundation of the wall of the city of God indicating a unique placement. In Eph. 2:20, we are told that the church is built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*. Persons brought into the estate of apostles and prophets may help discover the treasures that are hidden in God's word and to chart a direction for God's people but all ministries generally build upon the foundation already laid in the Scriptures.

Chapter 4

Primary Responsibility of Ministries

In the last chapter, we saw that the primary responsibility of persons in the five-fold ministry is the ministry of the word of God and prayers (Acts 6:3.4). By these influences, they bring the rule of God to bear over His people and over their interests. The many-sided purpose for which the Lord places the five-fold ministry in the Church is covered in the Eph. 4:8 - 16 passage among others and is reproduced below for convenience.

⁸Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave some, apostles; and some,

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: ¹⁶From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Let us identify and consider two key Truth principles found in this passage

- (i) the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry,
- (ii) the edifying of the body of Christ:

Spiritual Leadership

The way the first of the two goals above are presented here in the KJV of the Bible can easily lead to a misunderstanding. The five-fold ministry cannot and so is not intended to bring the saints to perfection in the absolute sense. That will be achieved in the overcoming saints through the ministry of Christ while yet they are still alive in the earth. The word *perfecting* here is a translation of the Greek word *kat-ar-tis-mos*'. It occurs only in this passage and means *complete furnishing* (SEC G2677). It comes from a root word which means *to complete thoroughly*, that is, *repair* (literally or figuratively) or *adjust*: - fit, frame, mend, (make) perfect (-ly join together), prepare, restore (SEC G2675). The phrase *the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry* thus actually means "the preparation (furnishing, equipping) of the saints (with all that they need) to effectively partake (share in) the work of the ministry".

The second goal, *the edifying of the body of Christ*, is similar to the first. The word *edifying* is from the Greek word *oy-kod-om-ay*' and connotes the idea of the raising up of an edifice, a temple (SEC G3619). This brings the mind to Eph. 2:19-22.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

This edification of the body of Christ implies a continuous building up of the saints to be more like Christ in preparation for a finishing work that will be carried out by the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming.

That brings us to verses 13 through 16 of Eph. 4. The saints were formerly *strangers* and *foreigners*, each taken from his primitive tribe with all its culture, traditions, beliefs and ways of life. They have been brought together into the body of Christ unto **the realization of a divinely set out purpose**. By the collective labours of the five-fold ministry they are to be brought into the knowledge of the Son of God.

Spiritual Leadership

This passage also speaks about a midstream goal referred to in the passage as the *unity of the faith*. The *unity of faith* implies a common understanding respecting the knowledge of the Son of God and of His saving plan **to the extent revealed**. It does not necessarily mean a common understanding of all the scriptures but a common understanding of that measure that the Lord has revealed to the church through the ministries (Phil 3:15, 16).

In addition to the above, there is a related work of the Holy Spirit through the five-fold ministry towards bringing the faithful to a status called in this passage a *perfect (matured) man ...That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love....*

This great task can only be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the servants of God serving the body of Christ in His interest habitually wait upon their ministries divinely set goals are realized. All as a ministry challenge must personally receive this and

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

walk in faithfulness to the Redeemer-King. The average believer is hardly walking in moral and spiritual victory no thanks to prevailing weakness in pulpit ministry of many leaders.

Now, we are told in our passage what will follow if the ministries are faithful to their callings. The way will open to further growth experiences, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; the body will grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ. This further growth will be made possible by the body edifying (building up) itself in love.

It takes the ministry of the body to itself in love for the local church to grow into all that God has purposed for her. The five-fold ministry builds up and equips the saints to be able to meaningfully contribute to the work of the ministry. Once established in the truth and built up in the life of Christ, each saint becomes an effective channel through which the Lord can build up the local church. And then through the combined ministry of those that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry and all vital members of the body that have been built up (every joint supplying, every part working

Spiritual Leadership

effectually, the entire body building up itself) all are further increased.

Without the five-fold ministry, the saints cannot grow; without the labours of the saints (other members of the body of Christ) sharing in the work of ministry according to the diverse distribution of the graces of the Holy Spirit, persons in the estate of the five-fold ministry themselves cannot experience further growth. This is the mystery of the body of Christ.

Growth is mandatory for all believers (Heb. 5:12). The Lord commands each believer to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18) and to be involved in the service of the kingdom (Luke 19:3). When the five-fold ministry labours faithfully in the word of God and prayers, there will be evident spiritual growth in the Assembly. The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ (Eph. 1:15- 23) will rest upon an increasing number of persons. There will be additions to the local church both numerically and in spiritual stature. From the midst of the church, prepared vessels will be dispersed to other

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

local churches all over the earth causing the work of the kingdom to expand (Acts 13:1-3).

Beyond The In-Part Realms

⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹²For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor. 13: 9-12).

Every manifestation of the grace of the Spirit in ministry, including each expression of the five-fold ministry, is only a part of the full glory that the believer is being led into. The ultimate goal is sonship (perfection in the image and likeness of the Son of God; possessing the fullness of the divine glory and serving as full-grown priests and kings after the power of an endless life).

Spiritual Leadership

The scriptures reveal that there are two levels of ministry that comes after the five-fold ministry and are to be revealed in the church particularly at the time of the end. The first is the ministry of **kingdom prophets**; the second is the ministry of **full-grown sons of God in visible human form**. These additional graces of life and ministry are to be revealed in congregations that are well established in the knowledge of God and His plans and purposes. They who come to spiritual maturity and faithfully serve the Lord are drawn unto the full prospects of perfection and glorification.

It is not our intention to go into further depths in this meditation but just to note that there are things beyond the five-fold ministry that are to be revealed in the church at the time of the end. The full emergence of kingdom prophets and the ministry of persons standing in the fullness of Christ while yet visible among men are **crucial** for the completion of God's program for the church, the winding up of the church Age and the introduction of the millennial reign of Christ. We must seek the Lord for the full entrance of the local church and of ministries among them into these graces for the time is at hand.

Chapter 5

Bonding through Fellowship

¹I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ²With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ⁵One Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. ⁷But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:1-7).

⁵This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 Jhn. 1:5-7)

Spiritual Leadership

All believers in Christ Jesus in this Age have just one and the same calling: the call to share with the Lord Jesus Christ, the principal Son, in His nature, glory and office as High Priest and King through whom the kingdom of God is to be established upon the earth. In Phil. 3:14, the calling is said to be the *High calling of God in Christ Jesus*; in Hebrews 3:1, it is said to be *the heavenly calling*.

There is no other calling other than this that is offered to the believer in this Age. All those that are faithful to the demands of the call are to be conferred with the honour of sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21). Those who come unto an inheritance in the kingdom less than this, do so, not because that was the lot appointed unto them by God, but only because they were not sufficiently faithful to the demands that go with the High calling.

There is One Lord over all believers and all members of the local church, One God and Father of all, who is above all, lives in and operates through all. From Him *all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth*

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

with the increase of God (Col 2:19; Eph. 4:15, 16). The place of Christ and His headship over the body must be wholly submitted to if the local church is to experience increasing nourishment and grow into all of the purpose of God.

When the head is severed from the body, there can be no more nourishment and flow of life. The body is not only headless but also lifeless, a dead carcass. It may still be having its religious activities but growth is truncated. What remains is dreadful path that leads into oblivion.

A system of things has developed in the church world that sets aside the headship of Jesus Christ. This places man as head, even assigning him authority to rule over churches spread across cities, regions and nations. Though this condition has been for centuries, it is a most unfortunate development and bound to trigger terrible events that shall unfold in the religious world in these last days.

According to what we read in the scriptures above, there is no ground whatsoever for any believer, no

Spiritual Leadership

matter how gifted, to assume any special status in the house of God. There is also no true reward in any false form of humility that promotes the exaltation of any servant of God beyond measure or the worship of man in any slightest form (Col 2:18). All who do such things are partaking in grievous idolatry and helping to build a system of things that will be visited with the fullness of the wrath of God.

The sole lordship of Jesus Christ places all believers on an equal footing before Him. All are His children and subjects; all have access to Him and are to manifest His life. We must all **hold the Head**, individually and as local expressions of the body of Christ.

According to Eph. 4:1, there is a vocation wherewith we have been called. It involves training for placement with the Lord in glory. Associated with this, are testing events designed to prove our worthiness for this honour. As with the pattern Son, whose holiness of life and total submission to the Father's will qualified him to be made the High Priest (after the power of an endless life) (Heb. 5:5-10; 2:10), so also shall all believers in Christ in this Age be first of all tested for faithfulness.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

What is tested is principally the believer's disposition to righteousness and submission to the Father's will. It is when a believer is through this process perfected that he will be conferred with the honour of sharing in Christ's priestly ministry. Now as **priests unto God** (Rev 5:10; 1 Pet 2:5), we are being trained in sacrificial living, learning submission to Him, allowing Him to build us up increasingly in His image and likeness. It is only those who prove faithful under the vocation that will become the **priests of God**, filled with the same life and glory that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest entered into after His resurrection.

²³And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. ²⁵For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

The scriptures in Eph. 4:1 command us to walk worthy of this vocation wherewith we have been called by, among other things, *endeavouring to keep the unity*

Spiritual Leadership

of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The *unity of the Spirit* is something which the local church, and indeed the entire body of Christ, has in possession. It came with the fact of our spiritual birth. It needs only be kept. We are all citizens of heaven; our common name (identity) is righteousness (*the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus: 2 Cor. 5:21*). We all have the same life; our new-creation man is created after God in true holiness and righteousness and is indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. Righteousness, faith, hope and love flows naturally from the life that is within us. It will be strange for any vital member of the body to manifest another life other than that which flows through all the body from the Spirit.

It is the command of the Lord that this unity in the body be kept by all good means by all members of the local church. The word, *keep* here is from the Greek, *tay-reh'-o* and means to *guard* (from *loss* or *injury*, properly by keeping *the eye* upon) (SEC G5083). It is a military term and suggests that there are things in the environment that are working against the unity of the Spirit in the midst of the body. It also implies that deliberate effort, warfare and personal discipline would

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

be required on the part of each believer to stand approved before God in relation to this command. Indeed, the sacrifices required to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is part of the training and demands of the High calling of God in Christ Jesus upon all that are called.

Some of the things that are capable of breaching the *unity of the Spirit* in the local church include:

- Moral failures (lack of submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in one's moral life);
- Pride (ego, personal ambitions);
- Variance (contention, debate, strife) - mainly arising from differences in understanding of God's word or perception of His mind on issues with individuals holding strongly to their various positions (Gal 5:19-21).

Of course, as shown in Eph. 4, while the *unity of the Spirit* is to be kept by the church at all times, the *unity of the faith* is something she grows into. Without the

Spiritual Leadership

unity of the faith, the church cannot enter into the greater purpose of God because it takes the possession of truth for the life indicated to be experienced. So all Truth must and will be fully restored to the church. Then it takes time of continuous fellowship together, the workings of the Holy Spirit and anointed and faithful ministries for this to be realized.

It is the Lord's desire that the local church, and indeed the body of Christ in general, manifest at all times the *unity of the Spirit* and comes to the unity of the faith. He seeks that the church be one and is committed to bringing it to pass. For this purpose, He manifested His name unto us, giving us the words and the glory that the Father gave Him (John 17:21-23, 6, 8, 14). As long as every vital member of the local church commits to fellowshipping with Him and with one another, this purpose shall be realized in their midst.

If every vital member of the local church is living true to the knowledge of God that have been received (walking in the light) there are **continuous** workings of moral and spiritual transformation that will be

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

accomplished in them by the Holy Spirit as they fellowship with the Lord and with one another (1 John 1:5-7). The things that are capable of breaching the unity of the Spirit will drop off as the blood of Jesus carries out continuous cleansing in their lives and there will be the gradual forging together of their hearts and minds until they become one.

Just like continuous fellowship of all vital members of the body is required for the local church to be made one, the regular fellowship of those among them who serve in leadership capacity in prayers and in the word of God is mandatory. If they must be one in God's purpose to be able to effectively fulfil the charge the Lord has given them, they should without fail meet regularly to seek the Lord's face for direction and guidance.

Chapter 6

The Local Church and the Body of Christ

Introduction

The body of Christ consists of all those that have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in this Age and are giving diligence to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet 1:10). The Lord has arranged that this body should find expression all over the earth. The basic unit of the body of Christ is the believers in a given identifiable geographical area. The local church is thus the gathering of the believers in that geographical unit.

The identifiable geographical area used to determine the boundaries of a local church in the scriptures is a city (Rev 2, 3), a geographical area with a common name and identity. **This is the only basis for the demarcation of the church in the scriptures. This**

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

demarcation is established purely for administrative purpose. Under the divine arrangement, there can only be one church in a city. In other words, all true believers in the city constitute the body of Christ in that city.

The body of Christ in a city is directly under the administration of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head. She administers her affairs under His headship but also benefitting from ministry of persons in the estate of the five-fold ministry who are gifts to the body universally. In other words, **the church in a city (the local church) is an autonomous unit under the oversight of a body of elders who submit to the Lord Jesus Christ as Head.** Then, it must be understood that because of the oneness of the body of Christ, she is also required to open up to receiving ministry from persons in other local churches who are Ministry Gifts.

The local church has a responsibility under the Lord to labour together with Him to realize His purpose in the midst of the body and to turn the kingdoms of this world over to Christ, beginning with her own immediate environment (Isa. 56:7; Mat 21:13). Thus, the local

Spiritual Leadership

church is God's servant in the earth, planted in a given area for the execution of God's plan there. God commits to releasing His great power and authority in support of the mission of the local Church. In the Book, *The Route of Divine Conquest*, we showed how God's saving purpose on earth is advanced through the obedient service of the local church.

Note carefully that the local church is not just a gathering of believers. We can distinguish between a congregation of God's people and a church in the sense in which it is used in the scriptures. For an Assembly to be regarded as a church by the Lord, there must be present among them **at least one** person that has come to the estate of the five-fold ministry who can minister the revealed word and take responsibility for the Church under His (that is the Lord's) lead. As we have shown earlier, there certainly will be more than one such person in a typical church. However, there must be at least one for a congregation to be able to assume the status of a church under God. There can be no candlestick without an angel (Rev 2:1, 8).

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

This point must not be confused with the fact of the presence of the Lord among His people. The Lord is present whenever His people are gathered both in small and large numbers, to bless and prosper them. But a congregation of God's people is not admitted into that status of being God's servant and instrument for the outworking of His purpose in the earth until there is at least one in their midst that has come to the estate of the five-fold ministry and can be entrusted with the administration of His goods (Mat 24:45-47).

The Lord by His Spirit supplies what is lacking in the midst of the local church. He forges dependence among the various parts of the body, putting abundant honour on that part which is uncomely so that there will be no schism in the body (1 Cor. 12:23-25). He causes the body to grow into more and more of His image and likeness as she continues in fellowship with Him and with one another. He enables the church to fulfil her mandate as the leadership and entire congregation cultivates dependence on Him and desire to do His will faithfully.

Spiritual Leadership

The Assembling Of Ourselves Together

Quite often, it may not be possible for all believers in a city to meet regularly in fellowship in one place because of logistic difficulties. Thus, it may be necessary for persons to meet at different places within the city for fellowship. However, because there can only be one church in a city, the divine arrangement will require that there should still be a forum for the regular fellowship of all the brethren in the city in addition to the meetings at various places. How often this takes place (once a week, fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly) will depend on their peculiar circumstances. However, the more regular the meetings are, the better is the divine purpose served.

In addition, as discussed in chapters two and three, the Lord expects the persons in leadership over the various congregations in the city to have regular times of fellowship together as well as meetings to handle issues of mutual interest that crop up from time to time.

It is possible for a city to have a metropolitan status (a mega city). The capital cities or commercial capitals

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

of most countries are usually of this form. In this case, there could be more than one local church in the metropolitan city. It is also possible for each local church to have different places of fellowship. However, the same divine arrangement discussed above always applies. That is, not only should the believers in a city within the metropolis meet together in fellowship regularly, all of the Lords people in the metropolis should also have regular times of meeting as often as practicable. So should those in leadership over the various assemblies consider as necessary their coming together to seek God's guidance and direction in ministry.

Because the body is one, fellowship among the various local churches in a region and/or country should also be encouraged (promoted). The free movement of people within a region or country ought to be utilized to promote the purpose of God for the church. However, **in doing this, the autonomy of each local church must be preserved so that the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ is not eroded.** The ever-present tendency to set up a "mega church" that is administered from one headquarter must always be guarded against with all

Spiritual Leadership

diligence. The goal should always be to strengthen one another through fellowship and through the impacting ministries of those in the five apostolic offices (Eph. 4:11).

As with the normal weekly meetings, times of regional/national gathering should be held before God in prayers and fasting. They could be occasions for the moving of God in ways that are unusual. In general, as always, God will give light, understanding and instructions to His people diversely as ministries faithfully proclaim the word of God and through the operations of the Spirit. There will be diverse interventions in the lives of the Lord's people. However, such coming together of local churches for the purpose of sharing fellowship should not be forced. As the Lord's people realize the benefits flowing from the meetings, more and more persons would seek and look forward to them.

In the same manner, much benefits can come to the body of Christ and to the various local churches in a region/country through the regular meeting of persons in leadership (or persons that have come to the estate of

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

ministry) in the local assemblies to pray together and seek the Lord for the increase of the kingdom among them.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Local Church and His Other Sheep

Through the course of the church Age, a lot of damage has been done to the body of Christ and to the cause of the kingdom. Many believers, even persons that God laboured to bring up to the estate of the five-fold ministry, have not submitted to the death-to-self disposition that is required to keep the *unity of the Spirit* in the midst of the local church. Little disputes, petty quarrels, misunderstandings, envy, jealousy, pride and ambition have driven men out of the local church and made them to set up their own kingdoms. The body of Christ has been mutilated with individuals carving to themselves different parts. Men rule in their little kingdoms as idol shepherds (Zec. 11:17;10:2), arrogating to themselves authority beyond that allowed in the scriptures and commanding such submission and reverence that is due only the Lord.

Spiritual Leadership

This emergence of an antichrist system started right in the days of the apostles (1 Jhn. 2:18-19). There were persons in the midst of the body who sought their own even at the expense of Christ (Phil 2:21). They spared not the flock but scattered and divided them for their possession. The denominational and organized church systems of our day are expressions of this great treachery against the Lord and His purpose in a much-developed form. They are religious extensions of the kingdoms of this world that must become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ (Rev 11:15).

The scriptures foretell us that in the closing days of the church Age, there will be the total restoration of truth, form and life to the church (Mal 4:5-6; Mat 17:11). These activities are associated with the work of harvest which the Lord carries out in the Church at the time of the end (Math 13:39). He will look upon his sheep that are scattered and lost and gather them together under His headship again, **that there may be one fold and one Shepherd** (John 10:16).

The Lord calls those of His people that He has already delivered out of the organized church systems of

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

the day and brought under His headship to labour with Him in this work of harvest (Mat 9:36-39). God's purpose for the church must be realized for the Age to be folded up. Until the church is perfected and brought into the fullness of the stature of Christ, the deliverance of the human creation and the earth from the bondage of corruption cannot be accomplished (Rom 8:19-21). And for the fullness to be revealed in the church, the Lord's people who are His sheep indeed must be gathered into His fold. Many also that the Lord has foreknown as belonging to His body but who are yet unsaved must come in.

The burden for the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mathew 10: 6) including the salvation of the many that would be part of the church that are yet in the world, is something that all members of the local church must carry both personally and collectively. Individually and collectively, we must seek the Lord for the fire, disposition, compassion and grace that is necessary to fulfil this desire in the heart of the Lord.

However, it must also be well noted that this outreach towards God's people (His flock that He

Spiritual Leadership

purchased with His own blood but who are held captive under the spell of religious Babylon) and towards the unsaved that the Lord shall call, is only one aspect (the beginning part) of the work of harvest. The other aspect relates to the challenge of the body (or rather individuals within the body) growing up into the full stature of Christ.

These two challenges must continually be before the local church. The deliverance of all of the Lord's sheep from the various sheepfolds of idol shepherds into the fold of the Lord only begins a journey into the realization of the burden in His heart. He purposes that His body may through the unity of the Spirit and of faith come into the fullness of the glory of the Father while here on earth. This is necessary for the world to know that the Father has sent Him and has loved the Church even as He loved the principal Son (John 17:22-23). The fullness of Christ revealed in the church is what the Father awaits and what creation is longing for. Until that is realized, there remains a desire in the Lord's heart yearning for fulfilment; a cry of the Spirit.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

The practical implication of this is that the involvement in the work of “*OUTREACH*” must be balanced with a personal and collective cry for an “*UPREACH*”.

Growth in His image and likeness, character, becoming more and more like Him (and not the services we carry out merely) is what qualifies us for a place with Him in His throne. It is life not service that crowns a man. What we do in service blesses others but it is what we do in relation to our own lives that make us worthy of reigning with Christ.

A believer may be involved in much service with spectacular results, and yet be rejected for a place on the throne if he did not habitually submit to the rule of the Lord and as such is not grown in His image (Mathew 7:22-23; 1 Cor. 9:27; Luke 19:14). But if we are opening up and giving attention to seeking more and more of His rule and the thirst to become fully like him is ever in our soul, then our services will count for greater honours in the kingdom. As we serve, we will also find that we are bearing fruits unto eternal life (John 4:36).

Spiritual Leadership

Yes! The hour has come for the glory of the Father to be fully revealed in the earth (Rev 14:1-5) and we have been brought into such a time as this. Having been delivered from the organized church system and brought into the sphere of what the Lord is doing in this end time, there is a great purpose before you and a great responsibility that has been placed by the Lord on your shoulder. You must live to realize His heart desire for this last hour; your life must count for His glory. A major part of this will have to do with how you discern the body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:29) and your absolute loyalty to Him.

But if you are still in the denominational and organized church systems of the day and you are His, then know that the cause of Christ cannot be served in such settings. Yes, you may be experiencing His blessings and mercies, for He always remain faithful, but the greater purpose of God cannot be fulfilled in your life while yet you are part of this treachery against Him. There is a cry going forth calling His people out of this organized disorder to begin the real journey into the full glory of the Father.

Spiritual Leadership: Elders and Ministry Gifts

His true sheep are already hearkening to His voice. All over the earth, in every nation, there is a body of people arising from the ruins of organized ‘*churchianity*’ and going on to meet the Lord in full union. You can be one of them, if you heed the call.

Spiritual Leadership

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